

VZCZCXR05607
RR RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #1575/01 1761201
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 241201Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4485
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001575

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS, EUR/RPM
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A, CG CJTF-101 POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER AF
SUBJECT: PANJSHIR PROVINCE: GOOD SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE;
DEVELOPMENT ONGOING, BUT COULD BE ACCELERATED

REF: Kabul 86

KABUL 00001575 001.5 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Panjshir remains one of Afghanistan's safest provinces. The Governor speaks out strongly against corruption and has taken action to avoid even the hint of impropriety, but the Provincial Council is largely in the Governor's shadow. Development and reconstruction is ongoing with a focus on electricity, agriculture and roads.

Security Remains Good

¶2. (SBU) In 2008, the security situation in Panjshir has been disturbed by a few minor incidents. In March, a small explosive device damaged a police checkpoint in Dara district. Two abandoned rockets of amateur quality were found pointed at the PRT in May. Neither incident has been explained, and investigations are ongoing.

In May, the executive director of Panjshir's hospital (which is run by Emergency, an Italian NGO) barely escaped an armed robbery attempt in Parwan province while driving his car from Kabul back to Panjshir. The assailants have not been apprehended. On the night of June 14, two rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire were directed at the PRT's communications site in Bazarak from a ridgeline approximately two-thirds of a mile away across the Panjshir river. The assailants did not hit the communications site.

An investigation into the attack is ongoing.

¶3. (U) The Panjshiri people, through their alertness to anything out of the ordinary, remain the key to security. Panjshir is an ethnically homogenous Tajik enclave and extremely rural. It is geographically a cul-de-sac; anyone entering or leaving the Panjshir valley must pass through the manned checkpoint at the "Lion's Gate."

Provinces with active insurgencies, including Baghlan, Nuristan, Laghman and Kapisa, share mountainous borders with Panjshir. The Panjshiri security forces' primary concern is guarding these mountainous borders against insurgent infiltration.

¶4. (SBU) Amrullah Saleh, the national director of the National Directorate of Security, is a prominent Panjshiri and regularly visits the province. Focused District Development (FDD) and rank reform efforts (e.g., chiefs failing proficiency examinations) have reshuffled some district chiefs of police and reduced some district police officer numbers to give sufficient resources to less secure provinces. Panjshir districts have not yet been selected for FDD. The Governor and UNAMA have asked the MOI to restore the ANP personnel, but overall realignment goals and the relative security

in Panjshir have precluded granting this request. Crime levels remain relatively low in the province, with most cases involving disputes between known parties.

¶15. (SBU) Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) has resumed in Panjshir under the Governor's leadership. UNAMA and Afghan National Army (ANA) representatives assigned to DIAG in Panjshir say the program is on track. The Governor called for weekly DIAG meetings and tasked Anaba to be the first district. UNAMA has recommended that Anaba be designated a "Peace District", qualifying it for award projects under DIAG. Upon its eventual designation, UNAMA would prefer that award projects be funneled through the Governor's office, and not through the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). MRRD in Panjshir is slow in implementing projects, which could discourage other districts from following Anaba's lead.

¶16. (U) Panjshir remains poppy free, but there are unconfirmed reports of an increase in hashish cultivation in Khenj district. There has been no increase in the small-to-moderate scale of drug trafficking through the province.

Governance: Strong and Non-corrupt Governor

¶17. (SBU) Governor Haji Bahlol Bahij is responsible for good governance in Panjshir. His anti-corruption stance has hardened. Recently, the PRT awarded a tender for the construction of a bridge in Rokha district to a contractor who was the Governor's brother-in-law, unbeknownst to the PRT. Despite repeated PRT assurances that it awarded the contract according to its standard best-value decision matrix, the Governor was adamant that the contract be re-bid to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, and he pressured his brother-in-law to withdraw from the contract.

KABUL 00001575 002.2 OF 002

¶18. (SBU) Governor Bahlol has sought the removal of incompetent provincial ministry officials in the Ministries of Women's Affairs and Public Works, but has been unable to get the authorities in Kabul to act. He calls in contractors whom he suspects of skimming and/or doing shoddy work to account for their performance. During Provincial Development Council (PDC) meetings, Governor Bahlol asks for updates and bluntly chides non-performers. Relations between the Governor and the Provincial Council (PC) are cordial and have improved since the election of a new chairperson. However, the PC does not challenge the Governor's preeminence. The PC is searching for an effective niche beyond being conveyors of assistance requests from Panjshiri residents.

¶19. (U) The greatest challenge facing governance in Panjshir is the scarcity of talented administrators as talented Panjshiris move to Kabul in search of opportunity. The suspicious attitude of the locals toward outsiders and the province's poverty make it difficult to attract non-Panjshiris to the valley. The schools are of such poor quality that the Governor relocated his family to Kabul to get better education for his children. Ministers rarely visit the Panjshir; in fact, no IRoA minister has visited since Education Minister Atmar came for the inauguration of the Panjshir Teacher Training College one year ago. When it is difficult to get the attention of ministries, the Panjshiris turn to the network of influential Panjshiris in Kabul to get things done, which does nothing to build the government's capacity to provide services.

Development: Roads, Power, and Fruit Trees

¶10. (U) Panjshir authorities' development priorities are roads and power. Education and agriculture are also high priorities. The biggest obstacle to implementation of these development priorities is the lack of coordination, information and capable administration. Daqiq, formerly the line-director for the Ministry of Economics and now the administrative executive and Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) liaison in the Governor's office, acts as Panjshir's primary development coordinator. He keeps track of provincial project lists and compiles the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) five-year plan for Panjshir, the Provincial Development Plan, and the Counter-Narcotics Trust

Fund/Good Performers Initiative funds.

¶11. (U) Panjshir's principal economic activity continues to be agriculture and, in particular, subsistence cultivation of small wheat plots. Panjshiri officials, most notably Hashmetullah Inyat, the capable new line-director for the Agriculture Ministry, are encouraging farmers to switch from subsistence wheat crops to higher-value horticulture. The bulk of the Good Performer Initiative funds awarded to Panjshir will purchase fruit trees and greenhouses. The value-adding step from fruit-harvesting to fruit-processing is also seen as a viable economic development possibility for the near- to medium-term. Agricultural officials want to improve animal husbandry through veterinarian services. Although previous international community investments in veterinary facilities have lapsed, the province is now restarting its efforts. Included in these efforts are women's poultry projects, while aquaculture (fish farming) is also being studied for the first time.

¶12. (SBU) The expenditure of CERP funds in Panjshir has risen every year since the PRT was established, including some USD 11 million for two major extensions of the paved road, and Afghanistan's first electricity-generating wind farm. On a smaller scale, the PRT's engineers and civil-affairs teams, along with USDA and USAID, are increasingly lashed up with the line-directors, National Solidarity Program staff, and NGO implementers. Japanese and Polish funding for development projects has also come to the valley in 2008 for the first time.

WOOD